A Transdisciplinary Approach to Knowledge Integration Research in Islamic Institutions: An Overview

Editorial

Welcome to the first ever, Special Issue of the Interdisciplinary Journal of Education whose theme is on Integration of Knowledge across the humanities, social and natural sciences through a holistic transdisciplinary framework; and whose content is a product of selected papers presented at the 6th International Islamic Universities Conference held from 4th to 6th August, 2025 at the Islamic University in Uganda, Mbale City. This IIUC follows a series of similar conferences held in 2014, 2016, 2019, 2021, and 2023; organized by Muslim University Morogoro, Islamic University in Uganda, Al Sumait University, Umma University, and Muslim University Morogoro respectively; in collaboration with the International Institute of Islamic Thought – East Africa (IIIT-EA, 2025).

People all over the world are experiencing meta crises characterized by complex, multifaceted, interrelated, and interconnected challenges – politically, socially, morally, spiritually, economically, ecologically, environmentally, mentally, etc. – which cannot be adequately addressed by mono-disciplinary approaches and methodologically restricted research paradigms (Hedlond et al., as cited by Biraima, 2025) but instead, by an integrated, transdisciplinary approach. Integration of Knowledge (IOK) generally means synthesizing the understanding of multiple knowledge disciplines into a common knowledge perspective; and from an Islamic perspective, it involves integrating Islamic moral and epistemological values in the various disciplines of knowledge that are taught (Kasule, 2015). The concept of transdisciplinarity has been accorded different meanings depending on what various scholars choose to focus on in terms of, among others, philosophy (Cicovacki, 2009; McGregory, 2004, 2014), methodology (Nicolescu, 2020), and knowledge production (Gibbons et al., 1994). According to Nicolescu (2010, 2014), Transdisciplinarity concerns building knowledge *beyond*, *across*, and *between* academic disciplines; with an aim of understanding the present world in all of its complexities. The 2025 IIUC papers that are published in this issue fall under subthemes of concepts, practical experiences and opportunities as they apply to transdisciplinary research within IOK.

Concepts, Models, and Processes of IOK in Transdisciplinary Research

As a part of the building blocks of research, both conventional and Islamic concepts, models, and processes constitute an integral part of IOK. In the first paper, Gyagenda argues for a re-thinking of the belief that sciences should be prioritised against humanities; a position that is highly advocated for in the 21st century. He calls for reflection on the importance of humanities and argues that undermining the humanities takes no cognisance of spirituality, cultural heritage values, and aesthetics.

The current education system, right from the lower to the higher levels has been criticised of not being able to produce all-round graduates. That is why there is a renewed attention to review curricula towards being learner-centred and competency-based. What is conspicuously lacking in the debates and discussions is the moral and ethical dimensions of the graduates. In the second paper, Miiro proposes the integration

of the God-consciousness and Wisdom Pedagogy approach into curriculum reforms as a strategy to address these missing qualities among learners in higher education institutions. In a similar vein, in the paper that follows, Aina-Obe demonstrates the relevance of *Ibn Khaldun's* educational philosophy to modern educational theory and practice in tackling contemporary issues in education, such as moral disengagement, fragmented learning, and cultural dissonance.

The major preoccupation of social workers is to provide services to members of society and to respond to the multifaceted challenges that society faces, which requires concerted efforts. In the fourth paper of this theme, Harun focuses on Muslim-based organizations and Islamic driven social work thoughts, concepts and practices as vital aspects in service delivery.

Practical Experiences Gained from Transdisciplinary Projects and Programs Within IOK

Quite a lot has been written about the integration of knowledge especially in Southeast Asia, but also in Africa (Nimulola, 2024), suggesting that Muslim scholars do appreciate it. What the 6th IIUC conference sought to achieve is provide a platform for researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and educators from various disciplines for collaboration and sharing of best practices in the phenomenon. Successful case studies where transdisciplinary approaches have led to significant advancements in understanding and solving real-world problems and practical benefits of integrating knowledge across disciplines were shared during the conference.

In the first such study under this theme, through exploring the intersection of Islamic principles and modern business practices, Anami points out that sustainability and ethical conduct are essential ingredients in long term organisational success and argues that integration of Islamic principles such as justice, honesty, trustworthiness, social responsibility, and fair dealings are key answers that promote sustainable growth, transparency and employee satisfaction in contemporary business environments.

It has been argued that the conventional interest-based banking model has driven economic growth at the expense of financial inclusion, income equality, ethical lending practices and inclusive social welfare. Is there an alternative? Anami, in another paper, argues that Interest free banking founded on Islamic Finance principles offers this alternative. In this paper, using leading interest free financial institutions, he demonstrates the potential to create a more inclusive, ethical and sustainable financial environment for a better win-win environment for both the institutions and society.

Transdisciplinarity research is all-embracing and may involve both scientific and non-scientific sources or practice. This was demonstrated by Abdinoor and Warfa in their study of the inter-play of conventional psychiatric methods and spiritual/religious oriented techniques of offering mental health services in *Shifaa* centres in Garissa County, Kenya. The paper offers new insights therapeutical interventions for mental health services and argues that spirituality and religion can be used for mental recovery.

Islamic education in schools is one of the avenues of integration of knowledge, and it is pivotal in the preservation of Islamic Culture and Muslim identity. Hence, the quality of schools is critical. In the fourth paper of this theme, Ramadhani presents the status quo of Community-Based Islamic schools in Kondoa District – strengths, weaknesses and challenges, pushing for reforms in order for them to rise to their purpose.

The role of Arabic language in the understanding and practice of Islam cannot be underestimated, more so if an Islamic component is embedded in it. In the fifth paper, using the teaching of Arabic Syntax as a model, Mohamed demonstrates how Islamic values can be integrated into Arabic language studies to enhance the understanding of Islamic principles and foster Islamic Cultural and spiritual identity as well as linguistic proficiency.

Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects of Transdisciplinary Research in IOK

As researchers embrace in transdisciplinarity and IOK, there is need to analyse the future trends, emerging challenges and opportunities for collaboration across disciplines. Under this theme, researchers share their findings on these aspects.

The philosophical foundation of Islamic education is that education should develop a complete human being who is intellectually sound, morally upright, and spiritually conscious, among others. This holistic approach ensures that education does not result in knowledge devoid of humility, or skills detached from ethics and purpose of man – to serve Allah his creator. In a bid to ensure that learning is ethically and spiritually grounded, Msoke, through her two-year experience of classroom teaching at the Muslim University of Morogoro, sought to design an Action-Based Linguistics Islamic Education Framework structured through Bloom's Taxonomy.

Muslims in Uganda are obliged to follow the Constitution, including its Succession Act which contradicts the provision of the Qur'an on property distribution, prompting Muslim jurists to push for the application of Islamic Succession law. However, this has been criticized for being discriminative between men and women. In the second paper of this theme, Kasozi and Nakitto argue that transdisciplinary research offers hope in tackling such issues, albeit challenges posed.

Like most developing countries in Africa, Uganda faces a number of socioeconomic challenges, despite international and national initiatives aimed at addressing these. Moreover, the Muslim population also has its reservations about some of the interventions. In the third paper, Buyondo, Serwanga, and Kasule argue that Islamic finance, rooted in the objectives of *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*, holds promise in enhancing financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, and community resilience.

If the movement of IOK and transdisciplinarity is to succeed, scholars have to do a lot of reading on concepts, methodologies, approaches, philosophies, e.tc far and wide. The good news is that materials can now be easily and – to some extent – freely accessed. In the last paper of this theme, Madete and Maina analyse how digital libraries increase access to varieties of resources, and perpetuate Islamic intellectual traditions and cross-disciplinary research in Islamic universities; of course with challenges experienced here and there.

A lot of thanks go to all the stakeholders who worked hard to make sure that this conference was a success. May Allah (SWT) bless their works.

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